DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 038 675 CG 005 221

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TITLE	Use of Simulation Activities as a Teaching Strategy in a Course on Change in the Schools.
INSTITUTION	Pittsburgh Univ., Pa. School of Education.
PUB DATE	[70]
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.85
DESCRIPTORS	*Changing Attitudes, Divergent Thinking, *Educational Methods, Educational Research, Graduate Study, *Learning Processes, Learning Theories, *Role Playing, *Simulation, Students

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the course "Change in Schools" taught at the University of Pittsburgh, spring, 1969. Both masters and doctoral candidates were enrolled. Objectives of the course were sent to the students before the spring session began. One objective required the students to do a detailed analysis of several common supervisory/curriculum problems representative of real problems they were facing in their job situations. Simulation techniques were used, and examination of their own performance in simulation allowed students to approach affective and process learning objectives. Students were required to "build in" the facets of a community and then to select a suitable table of organization (TO) for the school district of that community. The district was then populated with a board, superintendent, etc. through mock applications and personal history forms. The final evaluations of the course by students showed that the simulation experiences were important, meaningful, and useful for achieving the objectives of the course as perceived by the students. Some felt these experiences should have had more depth. More role playing, clearer directions and parameters for each experience were also suggested. (KJ)

ED038675

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USE OF SIMULATION ACTIVITIES AS A TEACHING STRATEGY IN A COURSE ON CHANGE IN THE SCHOOLS

by

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CG 005221

During the summer of 1968, the authors were involved in a seminar and practicum at Bethel Park, Pennsylvania. Drs. Champagne and Wilson of the University of Pittsburgh had designed this seminar as a field exercise in supervision which allowed supervisors and doctoral candidates to observe supervisors from the University working with student interns.

Discussions of what the supervisor actually meets on the job led to a consideration of the other half of the job--the interactions with administrators and others in school districts. Courses offered at that time dealt with activities centered around the teacher, but offered much less regarding change at the district level.

In the Spring of 1969 the authors presented a graduate seminar course in the Curriculum and the Supervision Department, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. This course, "Change in the Schools", met 15 times in seven and one-half weeks for three hours per session.

The students were masters degree and doctoral candidates in the School of Education who were enrolled in the course with the approval of the instructors. This approval was based on the student's current involvement or expressed interest in program or organizational changes in their home school districts. (Most Curriculum and Supervision students at the University of Pittsburgh maintain their involvement in school assignments while pursuing their degree requirements. These programs are tailored to provide practicum experiences in the student's home school setting along with the more formal university study. Both areas of experience are focused with University faculty members.)

The objectives of the course as stated in correspondence with the students before the Spring Session were as follows:

a. Students will master one or more problem analysis techniques. The criterion of mastery is; students will use these techniques effectively to do a detailed analysis of several common supervisory/curriculum problems representative of real problems they are facing in their job situations. (Actual job situations varied from a Teacher Corps Consultant to a secondary administrator.)

b. As a subset of problem analysis, students will master analysis techniques of formal and informal power structures in districts, recognizing whether they block or facilitate change/innovation strategies in curriculum and supervision areas. The criterion of mastery here is; the student will reach conclusions in his individual analysis similar to the conclusions of the group in about 80% of the cases.

c. Students will design alternative strategies based on the problem analyses to move the model organization toward its preselected goals. Students will select those strategies for use which have the highest probability of success.

d. Students will use these techniques with the real problems they bring to class during the final weeks of the course. (A hoped for criterion, but one not measurable during this course, is that students will continue to use their own variants of these techniques in their future on-the-job performances.)

e. Students will have increasingly accurate perceptions of their verbal, non-verbal and cognitive competencies for this role in schools. They will seek out and accept feedback from members of the class group--perhaps even from their job group. They will plan innovation strategies which make use of their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. They will use these perceptions to plan experiences which will continue their development of the competencies needed for this job.

f. Students will believe in the usefulness of getting others' views in analyzing curriculum and supervision problems and planning strategies to resolve those problems. They ask for others' views.

The original student handout contained brief statements of assumptions about teaching/learning which are summarized as follows:

Students should be involved in situations which are near-real, with clear structure and identifiable purpose to insure high involvement. Responsible teaching will be based on freedom for individual

choice within a structure which takes into account a clear diagnosis of the student's specific competencies. Examination of performance by themselves and others in simulation and role-playing situations allows students to approach affective and process learning objectives. There should be regular feedback (a class journal was used) to instructors by students on course directions and individual progress and needs.

Simulation was chosen because it offered the following advantages:

a. In the initial stages of class involvement students might be hesitant about discussing problems of their districts, but would not be threatened by hypothetical situations.

b. All students have the same input and thus are aware that no advantage is held by others. This heightens involvement and verbal participation.

c. Conjecture as to reactions is not blocked by prior knowledge which allows more facets of a course of events to be examined. More alternative outcomes which are tested in the strategies, lead to more experience in the process aspect of this learning.

d. Simulation allows the building-in of detail and thus the student can become more aware of the forces interacting in a given situation by their mere presence or absence.

e. Decisions and reactions which might take weeks or months in real settings can be contrived in minutes in simulation.

f. In simulations involving groups the "if-then" hypotheses of strategies under the scrutiny of immediate feedback are more effectively checked.

g. Students may have the chance to play many roles in a simulation which enhances their understanding of forces involved.

The Course Materials

Although superficial examination of the requirements lead us to believe we could simply present an entire package to the class, we discovered, after much consideration of the learnings involved, that our preparation of these materials automatically blocked many of the very things we wanted the class to consider. For example, the simple matter of a mock school district could easily end in a description which they might read but not consider in depth. On the other hand, with the class members required to "build-in" the facets of a community and then to select a "suitable" table of organization of the school district of this community, we predicted and got a much more detailed examination of the "meshing" aspects of the two. We decided to give the students only the most basic parameters of size and ethnic make-up and allow them, in groups, to construct the rest. A separate group, without prior knowledge of the community (Apple Blossom) was asked to devise sample T.O. formats for consideration and adoption (not without justification) by the community committee. During the discussions which ensued one highly experienced supervisor remarked when considering the organizational chart which resembled her own, "That's why nothing's moving!" She had seen a "decision" dead end in the structure of her own district.

With the community parameters, character and school district T.O. fixed, it became necessary to populate the district with a board, superintendent, etc.. We had considered simply using names, but the supervisor's game is one of analysing and helping people. A sense of reality with as many facets as possible was necessary. However, it was also clear that many supervisors, especially in large districts, might gain their first insights through personnel files. It was decided to allow members of the class to work up mock personnel by means of a form (copy provided in the appendix) similar to many application or personal history forms. A very interesting element here concerns the use of a photo as an idea-catalyst. Providing a picture makes development of a character much easier. Perhaps this is based on the human tendency to assume certain traits are tied to physical appearance.

Roughly fifty "people" were developed within a single assignment. Decisions as to reactions by these characters which were not clear were left to the student who had fabricated them.

Had more time been available, we might have totally role-played many more problems using these characters as reference points. However, the two we did find time for clearly indicated that the class could move quickly and comfortably ahead on either an analysis or role-playing without the hazy edges left by inadequate knowledge of people involved. It was also interesting to consider the "power" element when selecting characters for a problem as a motivation factor.

As we developed problems, we soon found that the term "problem" itself was inadequate. For example, the addition of a staff member would require serious consideration--but would not qualify necessarily as a problem. We settled on the word "situation" as a title for the exercises. Two were devised and used. One, a social studies department battle over inclusion of a unit on drugs in the course of study; the other a coordination situation in a math program. Both,(the math exercise especially), taught us that contrived situations can lack detail did indicate a much more in-depth analysis than we had expected.

The situations could be varied, since the authors had built in a "memo" privilege whereby additional data and changed conditions could arise as they do in real life, e.g., denial of requests, budget cuts, etc..

It was soon apparent that individual digestion of conditions and possible alternatives was a stronger learning force than any actual solution to the mock problems. The students became deeply involved in hypotheses as to the reactions of certain "kinds" of people. They looked at many stereotypes and remarked that they had not even been aware of the daily "interactions" with co-workers in their regular jobs. It would require many pages to list the individualized considerations of "threats, blocks helps" and other interaction categories which were a part of most discussions.

Of course, there are depts which were not reached. Time alone precluded building strategies to change individuals in the problems or

to shift personnel to show the changes in strategy necessary.

Each student was instructed to write a loosely structured journal after each class meeting. It was to contain reactions to the class, comments on class experiences, or other thoughts the students might have related to the issues treated in class. Individual comments by the instructors were made on each journal entry from every student during the course. The instructors kept one copy for later analysis.

The terminal and only other written assignment of the course was a final evaluation by each student of his achievement of the instructors' and his own objectives. The students were asked to discuss and evaluate course experiences in terms of these objectives. This final evaluation was also analyzed for student comments (if any) on the simulation experiences of the course. (All students individually recommended and received "A" grades for their work in this course.)

The final class meeting was a summary evaluation and feedback session. Most students expressed a highly positive affect, with specific data from their own changes in attitude, about the course. One student reported some disappointment that the course only gave her some new attitudes without many specific new techniques and skills.

The following is a summary of students' written comments from both sets of written feedback. It is intended to present a balanced sample of student reaction to the simulation experiences.

A. : Reactions written in the weekly journal.

1. "We could have been presented with an already developed community and T. O. (Table of Organization).... but I feel that if this had been done we would have lost something.... I am beginning to see the many problems that will have a part in developing supervisory and curriculum programs."
2. "As we developed our community, it was very clear how the type of community affects our schools ....I was not aware of the many facets of the community."
3. "The development of characters for our school also brought home the lesson of how superficial our knowledge of people is when we really work at knowing them."

4. "The whole session was so much involved .... many alternatives of attacking the problems .... how to approach the problem solutions .... indentification of personalities in positions of authority .... the relationships that should exist between me and authority positions."
5. "The discussion on the relationship of the organizational structure of the school administration to the community was too general, incomplete.
6. "The perspective of the change agent hired by the enemy (the administrators) is very unreal to me. Yet the class members discussed their positions as change agent."
7. "I feel we learned something very important."

The following were comments specifically about problem simulations based on the school district created earlier by the students in the class.

8. "I felt uneasy during the discussion on Tom's problem.... My discomfort was compounded by the slow movement of the group in completing the task."
9. "Working on the problems presented to us as an Instructional Consultant was a real challenge. I for one found I still have a long way to go. But this was a very successful way of finding out just what we still have to learn.
10. "What a relief to be developing behavior patterns instead of just being given facts."
11. "Aside from the specific content, it becomes clearer and clearer to me how difficult it is to translate an intellectual understanding of the Instructional Consultant into a pattern of behavior for myself."
12. "Bob and Frank last week had a scheme which looked good on paper. As they acted it through, they found it coming out differently."
13. ".....there were different members of the class interpreting our behaviors in various ways."

Several class members wanted to spend more time with this first

simulation problem. They felt that we rushed the development of the T.O. and the development of the community for the school district we were creating. Two class members wanted clearer directions given about rationale and organization of the simulation experiences. Most students felt that they had changed some of their thinking or their behavior as a result of them. The need for more detailed information about the school district became increasingly apparent to many students as the problems were attempted.

B. : Reactions written in the final evaluation of the course:

1. "In the simulation sessions the whole class .... cooperated. I like to feel that most of the specific objectives of the course as were originally stated were met .... It is something I will have to wait and see when I attempt to put these techniques I have learned into actual practice .... I hope I have found a new direction, a new outlook, a tolerance I'm sure I did not have before.
2. "Course extremely successful as evidenced by remarks of class .... School system should be developed more quickly and therefore can be utilized over a longer period of time. More simulated situations would be good."
3. "We had our first workshop day today ... Many of the strategies we discussed in class were able to be applied."
4. "It was frustrating to me when we didn't finish. But then I realized that the learnings associated with the process of working on the T. O. and the problems of Apple Blossom School District were more meaningful than the completion of the follow through. Also, through the beginning sessions it became clear that people involved in change processes had to consider the total constellation of the school district -- its organizational pattern; its complexity; its effectiveness; its economic and social make-up; and the educational goals of the administrative staff, the teaching staff, the school board, and the local community.... More than anything I feel the simulation experiences helped bring this about. .... Perhaps this was because the

simulation gave us the opportunity to bring ourselves into a situation where we could begin to identify some good interaction skills--use them--evaluate them--and have others judge their effectiveness....

It seemed to me that when we began to recognize ourselves in this role and when we did simulation on the problems then the group seemed to form the same gestalt.

One drawback to simulation experiences is that it is hard to tell what happens when people go back to their own environment.

....the whole semester of work could have been spent on each of the parts of things we did."

5. "I left a meeting the other day where the results accepted were about what I wanted but as I evaluated it (something I seldom did before) I realized that the method used was wrong and probably created more problems."

Other comments generally followed the ones quoted. The final evaluations show that simulation experiences almost universally have a strong positive effect. The negative aspects generally reflect varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the incomplete use of the simulation experience.

The most difficult to accept, however, was the relatively small number of techniques we could consider for use. In addition, it would have been valuable to move with a mock department head through a videotape of one of his teachers in action and then devise a double strategy for use in the pre-conference conference. The possibilities seem endless.

Summary Recommendations and Suggested Improvements

We were generally satisfied that the simulation experiences were important, meaningful, and useful for achieving the objectives of the course as perceived by the students.

Of course we did not do any of the experiences in the depth which would have satisfied us. Several of the students expressed this same feeling in their comments. We are considering more role-playing of the

problems which are based on the school and community as it has been constructed by the group. Also, clearer directions and parameters for each experience so that the class knows how each activity fits into the whole are necessary.

Some of the more specific, mechanical things we are considering are as follows:

1. Dividing the class (assume an arbitrary twenty-one) to form these groups:
   a. Five decision makers
   b. Five community designers
   c. Five T. O. designers
   d. Six people, two to each group as process observers who do nothing more than focus the groups

   These observers have no power in the sequence.

As the community group begins to evolve the parameters of the mock set up they pass these along to the decision group where the necessary action to accept or reject is made. These decisions are forwarded to the T. O. group for inclusion in their data necessary for devising the T. O. structures they will eventually present to the decision body for approval. (Throughout this activity the observers are charged with holding the groups to productive lines.)

An additional feature of this reorganization is the rotating of group members (including the observers) one at a time to insure that each student receives the benefit of activity in each segment and to add new input to each group every fifteen minutes.

During the process a member of each group will be drawn to form teams of four. These teams will discuss their own learnings from the activity. They will also meet at the end of the simulation sequence in order to allow each student to focus the material he intends to include in his journal for the preceding session.

APPENDIX

MOCK PERSONNEL FORM

PROFILE OF _____

BY _____

POSITION TITLE _____

PHOTO

(1)

PERSONAL DATA:

EDUCATION:

EXPERIENCE

ACHIEVEMENTS:

HOBBIES:

MIGHT BE CLASSIFIED FROM (1) IMPULSIVE TO (5) RIGID
IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:
(add your own here)

Curriculum innovation	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Student's rights	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher rights	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Finance	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Delegation of detail											
Major	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Minor	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5
Relates to minority	1	2	3	4	5	----------	1	2	3	4	5

Profile of _____
by _____
Position Title _____

(2)

RELATES TO THE COMMUNITY:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

RELATES TO THE BOARD:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

RELATES TO HIS SUPERIORS:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

RELATES TO HIS SUBORDINATES:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

RELATES TO TEACHERS:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

RELATES TO STUDENTS:
PUBLICLY:

PRIVATELY:

SEES HIS OWN ROLE PUBLICLY:

SEES HIS OWN ROLE PRIVATELY:

CHECK THE APPLICABLE STATEMENTS BELOW:

Finds a scapegoat and rides him.
Professes not to have the answer to avoid confrontation.
Doesn't like to move too rapidly--doesn't get started.
For every proposal sets up an opposite to create a middle ground.
Points out that an attempt to reach a conclusion is futile.
When caught says something that the group cannot understand.
Is embarrased--hints that the problem is in bad taste or too elementary.
Cannot separate the problem from other problems and thus no solution.
Rationalizes the status quo.
Points out that those of us who see the problems do so because we are unhappy.
Stalls by asking what is meant by the question.
Seeks all of the dangers in any specific formulation of conclusions.

Profile of _____
by _____
Position Title _____

(3)

Seeks interminable philosophical answers and thus no solutions.
Moves into endless ways of looking the problem over and studying it.
Puts off everything until it has been settled by scientific research.
Retreats into general objectives.
Find a face-saving verbal formula.
Shows that the problem exists everywhere--so it is not a problem.
Introduce analogies and discusses them.
Excessive explanation and clarification.
Says that any proposal has already been utilized for ten years.
Appoints committees to reach tentative conclusions, etc., etc., etc.....
Waits for expert consultation.
"That is not on the agenda...we'll take it up later."
Concludes that we are all clear on the problems even though we have no solutions.
Points out that the greatest have struggled with this problem--how can we solve it?
Is thankful for the problem because it has stimulated our thinking--Solution?????